

The President's Daily Brief

March 4, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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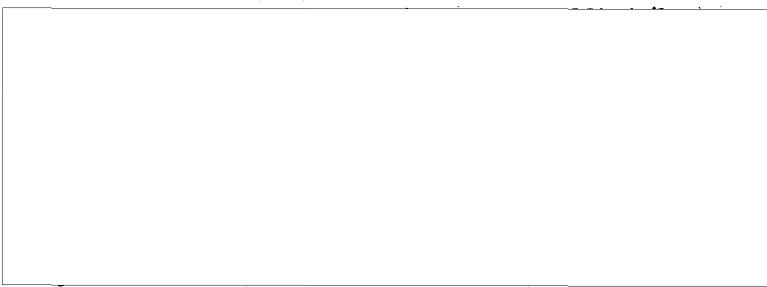
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CHINA ~ NORTH VIETNAM

Signs of tension in China's relations with North Vietnam appear to be on the upswing, in the wake of the increased fighting in South Vietnam. Hanoi has long held the view that Peking has been stingy in its aid to the war effort in the South, while Peking is concerned that Hanoi might, at China's expense, seek to expand its influence in all of Indochina.

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Peking's press coverage on increased fighting in South Vietnam has been remarkably reserved. The Chinese, as expected, have treated communist battle initiatives as "defensive," but Peking has paid little attention to the successes these actions have produced. Peking's publications continue to assert China's historic claims to sovereignty over the Paracel Islands, perhaps partly in response to reported North Vietnamese protests over the Chinese military action there in early 1974.

The current situation in Cambodia is almost certainly influencing Peking's wary attitude toward North Vietnam. As the Khmer communists, whose ties with Hanoi are apparently closer than those with Peking, draw nearer to a military victory in Cambodia, Chinese fears of North Vietnamese influence in Phnom Penh almost certainly grow. The Chinese also seem concerned about increased Soviet influence on the Khmer communists, both direct and indirect through Hanoi, in the event of an early communist victory.

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China apparently does not believe that the communists will win a quick victory in South Vietnam and apparently would prefer a continuation of the present situation. A quick victory, together with a communist take-over in Cambodia, would lead to serious problems for Peking. Chinese leaders surely recognize that the consequent absence of a strong US presence in Indochina would bring Peking into more direct and costly competition there with both North Vietnam and the Soviet Union.

At the same time, however, the Chinese are obviously interested in maintaining their equities with North Vietnam. The delivery in early February of eight MIG-19 fighters to Hanoi was probably a sop to North Vietnam's desire for additional military support. A Chinese military delegation arrived in Hanoi last week almost certainly to discuss the Cambodian situation with Vietnamese officials. The delegation is probably also intended to balance the visit to Hanoi last year of a high-level Soviet military group.

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THAILAND

The oft-postponed vote of confidence to decide the fate of Seni Pramot's proposed coalition government is now scheduled to take place on Thursday.

The vote promises to be close. As a member of the small political center, Seni apparently is looking to the left to ensure his victory. This might explain press reports that he will propose in his policy statement to the assembly on Thursday that all US forces be withdrawn from Thailand within 18 months. The socialists have indicated that they will not support a Seni government unless it sets a timetable for US withdrawal. This is a condition, however, that the Thai army and the political right may not be willing to accept if the situation in Indochina continues to deteriorate.

The conservative faction, meanwhile, believes it has the strength to defeat Seni if the vote of confidence is taken by secret ballot. [redacted]

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KOREA

The incident off the west coast of Korea on February 26 has again raised the issue of North Korean access to international waters south of the seaward extension of the Demilitarized Zone--the UN Command's unilaterally declared "Northern Limit Line."

The appearance of eight North Korean fishing boats and two military escort craft in the area west of Inchon is not unprecedented, though a group this size is something new in recent years. Indeed, the group's size and the presence of escort craft suggest that Pyongyang planned the incursion to probe the limits of South Korean (and US) tolerance of North Korean activity in the seas west and south of the Northern Limit Line.

Pyongyang seeks to draw world attention to a situation in which its vessels are denied passage through international waters, hoping that South Korea and the US will show greater restraint in enforcing the Northern Limit Line--much as we have in the area of the west coast islands. In concrete terms, the North wants a share of valuable fisheries, guaranteed access for merchant ships to its growing port at Haeju, and a stronger claim to a share of seabed resources, including oil, in the Yellow Sea.

It is difficult to say whether the North will dispatch additional craft to the contested area during the current fishing season. If Pyongyang were convinced that new incursions would not lead to another military response and new ship losses, it would almost certainly continue to probe. The North Koreans thus may decide to see how the overall South Korean and US position develops in the aftermath of the latest incident before they make further moves.

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A cease-fire in southern Lebanon between the army and leftist and fedayeen forces went into effect late Sunday.

The agreement has stopped most of the fighting, at least temporarily, although there are still some clashes. A general strike also is still in effect in Sidon and Tyre. Palestine Liberation Army officers are convinced that radical fedayeen from the so-called "rejectionist" groups infiltrated Sidon during the fighting. The major fedayeen groups have remained on the sidelines, and their Beirut headquarters continue to counsel them to remain calm.

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Portugal's moderate civilian politicians are cautiously optimistic that an acceptable compromise can be worked out with the Armed Forces Movement on the military's continuing role in Portuguese politics.

Their hopes may be premature, however, since only the first round of negotiations has been completed, and the Movement has yet to respond to the politicians' counterproposals. Should the Movement refuse to budge, the political parties might be unwilling to press their objections. The start of the campaign for the constituent assembly elections is tied to an agreement on the program. The beginning of the official campaign period has already been postponed from March 3 to March 20, and any further delay would probably mean a postponement of the elections, now scheduled for April 12.

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Ethiopia's ruling military council took a major step toward its avowed goal of a socialist Ethiopia today by announcing the abolition of the country's feudal land-tenure system.

Private land holdings will be limited to about 25 acres, according to press reports. Preparations for the proclamation have been closely held. [redacted] [redacted] the council anticipates considerable unrest in rural areas as peasants move against large landowners.

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